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ABSTRACT

The study investigated how often and to what extent during a multifactored assessment 71 school psychologists used techniques for nondiscriminatory assessment and determined the level of their participation in developing educational programs for handicapped minority students. Results of the School Psychologists Use of Nondiscriminatory (SPUN) Assessment indicated that the Ss seldom used techniques described in the SPUN or other less publicized procedures. Ss revealed, however, that they did participate in certain aspects of educational programing. Based on these results, it was recommended that preservice and inservice training programs consider including competency areas which emphasize the use and development of techniques for nondiscriminatory assessment and participation in the development of educational programs which enhance cultural diversity. (Author/CL)

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*School Psychologists' Use of Techniques for Nondiscriminatory Assessment

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Abstract

This study investigated how often and to what extent during a multifactored assessment school psychologists used techniques for nondiscriminatory assessment, and determined the level of their participation in developing educational programs for handicapped minority students. The School Psychologists Use of Nondiscriminatory Assessment (SPUN) was used to elicit responses from the 71 school psychologists who participated in the study. The results indicated that the participants seldomly used the techniques described in the SPUN or other less publicized procedures. The school psychologists revealed, however, that they did participate in certain aspects of educational programming. Based on these results, it was recommended that preservice and inservice training programs consider including competency areas which emphasize the use and, perhaps, development of techniques for nondiscriminatory assessment and participation in the development of educational programs which enhance cultural diversity.

*School Psychologists' Use of Techniques for Nondiscriminatory Assessment

Introduction

During the past decade educators have become increasingly concerned about the use of standardized tests to identify and place handicapped minority students, especially blacks and Hispanics (Gay & Abrahams, 1972). Tests were often depicted as discriminatory because they projected only white, middle-class values and attitudes and did not reflect the linguistic and cultural experiences of minority groups. The use of tests often lead to stereotyped educational practices, helped maintain prejudicial attitudes, and restricted educational and vocational opportunities for youngsters, both handicapped and nonhandicapped (Oakland, 1973; Laosa & Oakland, 1974). Another result was the identification of handicapped students from minority groups in numbers that were dispropportionate to the racial composition of society as a whole, which resulted in disproportionate numbers in special education classrooms for the educable mentally retarded (Burke, 1975). Despite efforts to reverse this trend, the results of a recent survey indicated increasingly disproportionate numbers, especially blacks, in special education classrooms overall (Tucker,1980).

Charges of racial bias leveled specifically at the assessment process and the assessors were followed by resolutions from the Association of Black Psychologists, and other professional organizations, calling for a moratorium on the use of tests with minority group children. The judicial system became involved to determine the extent childrens' rights were being violated. Findings from Diana v. California State Board of Education (1969) and, more recently, Larry P. v. Riles (1979) confirmed the existence of discriminatory practices. These findings were affirmed by Congress in Public Law 94-142, which, among other guidelines for evaluation, requires the establishment of procedures for the selection and use of tests that are not racially or culturally discriminatory.

Duffey, Salvia, Tucker, and Ysseldyke (1981) described discriminatory assessment as constant error in decisions, predictions, and inferences about members of particular groups. Historically, strategies employed to eliminate discriminatory aspects included attempts to minimize the cultural and verbal components of testing; so-called culture free and culture fair testing (Cattel, 1950; Davis & Eells, 1953). More recently, other strategies have been developed that are potentially nondiscriminatory. Culture specific tests, such as the Black Intelligence Test of Cultural Homogeneity (BITCH) (Williams, 1972), were developed for a specific racial group having a common, identifiable geographic region. Criterion-referenced measures were also described as an answer. These tests assessed specific educational goals and were suggested to be more relevant to educational intervention (Drew, 1973; Brady, Manni, & Winnikur, 1983). DeAvila and Havassy (1975) proposed the use of tests based on Piaget's stages of cognitive development. They contended that these tests were more likely to determine fairly the abilities of children from culturally diverse backgrounds. Feuerstein (1979), among others, proposed assessing an individual's learning potential rather than current abilities, a factor measured by traditional intelligence tests. Feuerstein concluded that this learning potential assessment device (LPAD) is a fairer means of assessment, since it might reduce the effects of cultural disadvantage.

One of the newer approaches to nondiscriminatory assessment has been the use of pluralistic norms, such as the System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment (SOMPA) (Mercer & Lewis, 1978). Used with existing tests, pluralistic norms are usually standardized on blacks, Hispanics and other racial and cultural groups. Translating existing tests into other languages (Alzate, 1978), altering test administration procedures (i.e., Harber, 1982), and training children to take tests (Oakland, 1972) have been suggested as procedures which improve performance on standardized tests. Proponents of these approaches contend that minority group childrens' scores are more accurate and testing is less

discriminatory (Bailey & Harbin, 1980).

While much criticism has been leveled at the discriminatory aspects of testing, referral and placement also have the potential for bias. During referral teachers may refer as academic problems those children who have not been the lowest academically in the class but those whose behavior they find disturbing, from families that speak a foreign language, or who exhibit other characteristics (i.e., dress poorly) (Tobias, Cole, Zirbin, & Bodlakova, 1982). As noted, during placement many minority group children have been routinely placed in classrooms for the educable mentally retarded. Given the strong evidence that such classes were often ineffective (Dunn, 1968), assignment often constituted evidence of a discriminatory practice (Oakland, 1980).

School psychologists often have direct control over some of the factors that contribute to discriminatory assessment. Much control is exhibited when these professional use techniques which facilitate nondiscriminatory assessment and participate in the development of educational programs for handicapped minority students (Fairchild, 1982). While techniques are available, the extent that they are being used has not been determined. Some researchers, in fact, have suggested that few school psychologists are trained in the area of nondiscriminatory assessment and, therefore, know little about procedures for evaluating children from minority group backgrounds (Coulopoulos, Note 1). The purpose of this research, then, was to determine how often and to what extent during a multifactored evaluation school psychologists employed certain techniques for nondiscriminatory assessment, and to ascertain the level of their involvement in developing educational programs for handicapped minority students. It was expected that the results of this investigation would indicate:

1. School psychologists seldomly used techniques for nondiscriminatory assessment.
2. School psychologists seldomly participated in developing educational

programs for handicapped minority students.

3. There is a significant difference among the frequency and degree school psychologists use nondiscriminatory assessment and the level of their participation in educational programming.

Method

Participants

Using a convenience sampling procedure (Sowell & Casey, 1982), the 200 participants in this investigation were from the membership of the Ohio School Psychologists' Association, which furnished a list of over 600 names and addresses. All were full-time school psychologists practicing in various school districts throughout Ohio. To increase the potential for participation by school psychologists working with handicapped minority student populations, approximately one-half, about 50%, of the participants practiced in urban areas. The other 50% practiced in suburban and rural areas.

Instrument

An experimental three-part questionnaire, based on a pilot survey of school psychologists in Tyler, Texas, was used in this investigation. The School Psychologists Use of Nondiscriminatory Assessment (SPUN), along with a stamped, self-addressed envelope, was mailed to each participant. After a second mailing, a total of 71 questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 36%. Racial composition of the school districts in which the participants worked was 88% white, 11% black, .7% Hispanic, and .3% other, including Asian Americans. In the special education programs the racial composition was 87% white, 12% black, .9% Hispanic, and .1% other, including Asian Americans.

The first section of the SPUN requested demographic information including race, sex, age, years of experience, educational level, and school setting (urban, suburban , or rural). Demographic data follow in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 About Here

The second section asked participants to specify the frequency ("how often") and degree ("to what extent during an evaluation") they used certain techniques for nondiscriminatory assessment. These techniques were selected from literature outlining various procedures (i.e., Duffey, et al., 1981) and included, along with descriptions, (a) culture free tests, (b) culture fair tests, (c) culture specific tests, (d) linguistic translations of existing tests, (e) alteration of test administration procedures, (f) Piagetian tasks, (g) pluralistic norms, including SOMPA, (h) criterion-referenced tests, and (i) the learning potential assessment device (LPAD). In addition, participants were allowed to respond if they used a combination of these techniques or other procedures. A two-dimensional rating system, portraying both frequency and degree dimensions, was employed in an effort to allow the respondents an opportunity to provide differential responses. The frequency scale was a Likert-type format ranging from 1 ("never") to 4 ("very often"). Similarly, the degree scale ranged from 1 ("never") to 4 ("during all phases of an evaluation"). The school psychologists were asked to respond to each item by circling their responses.

The third section requested from participants information concerning the extent they were involved in educating handicapped minority students. The 13 items in this section were selected from literature describing the responsibilities of school psychologists in providing appropriate educational programs for these students (i.e., Council for Exceptional Children, 1978). Participants responded on a Likert-type scale from 1 ("never") to 4 ("always") and were asked to circle their responses.

Mean scores for each participant were generated for the frequency scale, degree scale, and section three. Reliability for the SPUN was estimated using

the Coefficient Alpha formula (Cronbach, 1951), which yielded coefficients of .93 for the frequency scale, .95 for the degree scale, and .83 for section three. Validity was demonstrated through a significant correlation $r(25) = .75$, $p < .05$, representing the extent of agreement on the items of the SPUN between trainers of school psychologists (i.e., college professors) and chief school psychologists.

Results

To assess whether there were significant differences between observed and expected levels of using techniques for nondiscriminatory assessment, simple chi-square was employed (Norusis, 1982). As shown in Table 2, this procedure indicated significance levels of at least .05 on all items of both the frequency and degree scales of the SPUN. Consistent with expectations, the results revealed that par-

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Insert Table 2 About Here

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ticipants' mean scores were skewed, indicating that they seldomly utilized techniques described in the questionnaire. Chi-square was employed also to determine differences between observed and expected levels of participation in developing educational programs. Contrary to expectations, the results, depicted in Table 3, indicated that on certain items differences among mean scores were nonsignificant, indicating that the participants consistently: developed activities which enhanced positive self-concepts ($\chi^2 = 7.14$, $df = 3$, $p < .07$); developed activities which fostered motivation ($\chi^2 = 6.33$, $df = 3$, $p < .08$); communicated with parents in a fashion that depicted their cultural awareness ($\chi^2 = 5.56$, $df = 3$, $p < .14$); assessed to determine variations in learning styles ($\chi^2 = 5.11$, $df = 3$, $p < .16$); outlined provisions against long-term placement in self-contained classrooms ($\chi^2 = .38$, $df = 3$, $p < .94$); and specified appropriate curricular adaptations in the regular classroom ($\chi^2 = 3.20$, $df = 3$, $p < .36$).

Insert Table 3 About Here

To determine if significant differences existed among mean scores on the frequency scale, degree scale, and section three, univariate analysis of variance was conducted (Norusis, 1982). The analysis indicated that significant differences were evident, F (2,212) = 61.94, $p < .0001$. Post hoc analysis using the Tukey HSD procedure revealed that the participants had significantly higher mean scores on section three of the SPUN. This finding suggested that the school psychologists particpated in educational programming more often than they used techniques for nondiscriminatory assessment. Table 4 presents means and standard deviations for frequency and degree scales and section three

Insert Table 4 About Here

Discussion

The results of this investigation indicated that the participants seldomly utilized techniques which possibly reduce bias during assessment. This finding is generally supported by educators who suggest that school psychologists, regardless of the quality or recency of their training, are poorly prepared to evaluate children from minority groups (Telzrow, Note 2). Such poor training can be reflected in lack of knowledge about devices for nondiscriminatory assessment (Johnson, 1983), poor interpersonal skills which can adversely effect the performance of children on standardized tests (Oakland, 1980), and insensitivity to factors which bias test results, such as examiner bias, testing techniques, linguistic characteristics, and test format (Schultz & Fortune, 1981).

Contrary to expectations, the school psychologists indicated that they consistently participated in certain aspects of educational programming. This finding was affirmed in this investigation by significant results which indicated that the participants were involved in educational programming more often than they used techniques for nondiscriminatory assessment. Possible explanations for these results are twofold. First, since the enactment of Public Law 94-142, and in an effort to provide more appropriate education for the handicapped, school psychologists have expanded their range of professional responsibilities to become increasingly involved in consultation with teachers on curriculum modifications, remediation strategies, and behavior management programs (Gargiulo, Fiscus, Maroney, & Fauver, 1981). Second, many school psychology training programs that have traditionally emphasized the "psychometric model" are moving toward the "assessment-consultant model" described by Fairchild (1982) in an effort to appropriately meet the needs of a diverse population of students and to satisfy the increasing educational and administrative demands that are a corollary to conducting multifactored assessments.

The present findings imply that professionals hoping to provide appropriate education for handicapped minority students can begin with the inclusion of competency areas on nondiscriminatory assessment into preservice and inservice training programs for school psychologists. Content in such areas might emphasize: (a) culture, values, language, and behavior patterns; (b) school acculturation needs; (c) different learning styles; (d) ethical standards for educational and psychological testing, and for school psychologists; (e) other resources and methods of obtaining useful information; and (f) application of assessment results to the development of appropriate educational plans (Almanza & Mosley, 1980; Coulopoulos, Note 1). Additional content might focus upon the use and interpretation of standardized tests to obtain valid and reliable assessment information, and the use and, perhaps, development of proven techniques for nondis-

criminatory assessment.

Although the participants indicated that they were consistently involved in educational programming, the results validated significant participation on only six out of thirteen areas. In fact, in certain instances their involvement was typical (i.e., specifying appropriate curricula adaptations in the regular classroom) and not supplemental to what was provided to handicapped students in general. Educational programming for handicapped minority students continues to be an area where improvement is needed. Assuming that school psychologists have employed nondiscriminatory instruments, they must exercise special sensitivity in helping develop educational programs (Council for Exceptional Children, 1978). School psychologists, because of their unique position, can sensitize both administrators and practitioners to the cultural and linguistic characteristics which many minority children bring to school. Appropriate curriculum adaptations can revolve around materials and teaching activities which make allowances for cultural diversity.

Critics of this study will be quick to point out that some of the techniques described in this study have not been validated (i.e., SOMPA) and others have been determined to be of limited usefulness (i.e., culture specific tests). The fact remains, however, that few of the participants indicated using techniques that are often supported in the professional literature such as criterion-referenced tests (Oakland, 1980; Duffey, et al., 1981). Furthermore, most of the school psychologists did not specify the use of other techniques not considered in the questionnaire although they had an opportunity to provide this information.

The small sample size, coupled with the limitations of questionnaire research (see Campbell & Stanley, 1963), indicates that the results can be generalized only to a similar population. This research does represent a starting point in determining the extent school psychologists employ techniques for nondiscriminatory assessment. It seems reasonable to conclude that the use of such devices,

coupled with sound special education practices, can provide a basic foundation for meeting the needs of handicapped minority students.

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TABLE 1

Demographic Data

Characteristics	Frequency	%
Sex		
Male	24	33.8
Female	47	66.2
Age		
21-30	19	26.8
31-39	31	43.7
40-49	4	5.6
46 and above	17	23.9
Race		
Black	2	2.8
White	67	94.4
American Indian	0	0.0
Hispanic	1	1.4
Asian American	1	1.4
Years of Experience		
0-4	17	23.9
5-8	19	26.8
9-12	17	23.9
13-16	8	11.3
17 or more	10	14.1
Educational Level		
Bachelors'	0	0.0
Masters'	53	74.6
Specialists'	7	9.9
Doctorates'	11	15.5
Geographic Region		
Urban	23	32.4
Suburban	35	49.3
Rural	13	18.3

TABLE 2

Chi-Square Values on the

Frequency and Degree Scales

Items	Frequency		Degree	
	χ^2	p	χ^2	p
1. Culture fair tests	39.36	.001	44.73	.001
2. Culture free tests	50.86	.001	63.93	.001
3. Culture specific tests	160.83	.001	174.91	.001
4. Linguistic translations of existing tests	154.86	.001	148.10	.001
5. Alteration of test administration procedures	49.73	.001	43.76	.001
6. Piagetian tasks	84.89	.001	76.21	.001
7. Pluralistic norms, including SOMPA	68.44	.001	101.21	.001
8. Criterion-referenced assessment	8.38	.05	20.32	.001
9. Learning Potential Assessment Device (LPAD)	90.07	.001	95.48	.001
10. Combination of the above	111.25	.001	110.01	.001
11. Other techniques	148.10	.001	148.10	.001

N = 71, df = 3

TABLE 3

Chi-Square Values on Section Three

Items	χ^2	p
1. Heping develop educational programs (IEPs) which take into consideration language and dialect	11.87	.01
2. Developing behavior management plans.	15.82	.001
3. Outlining classroom activities which emphasize cultural diversity.	62.24	.001
4. Developing activities which enhance positive self-concepts.	7.14	NS
5. Developing activities which foster motivation.	6.33	NS
6. Communicating with parents in a fashion which depicts your cultural awareness.	5.56	NS
7. Identifying educational materials that depict multicultural themes.	43.08	.001
8. Assessing to determine variations in learning styles.	5.11	NS
9. Providing access to a full continuum of alternative placements.	18.41	.001
10. Providing opportunities for interaction with nonhandicapped minority and white children.	14.47	.01
11. Outlining provisions against long-term placement in self-contained classrooms.	.38	NS

TABLE 3 - cont'd

12. Specifying appropriate curricular adaptations in the regular classroom.	3.20	NS
13. Offering consultative services which help teachers foster sensitivity towards handicapped minority students.	11.99	.01

N = 71, df = 3

TABLE 4

Means and Standard Deviations for

Scores on the SPUN

Scales	N	M	SD
Frequency	71	1.51	.37
Degree	71	1.53	.47
Section Three	71	2.42	.71

Note: Total mean scores equal 213.